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June 12, 2014

The Honorable Lamar Alexander
United States Senate
455 Dirksen Senate Office Building
Washington, D.C. 20510

Dear Senator Alexander,

Thank you for calling attention to the important issue of student debt in your June 8th statement. This issue is critical for both undergraduate and graduate education. The Council of Graduate Schools (CGS) believes that the education community has a stake in finding ways to address the issues surrounding growing student debt. Going forward CGS would like you to consider the broader context to which the terms “graduate students” and student “debt” are used as this issue is discussed. Graduate students should not be characterized as a single, homogenous group. They instead encompass master’s, doctoral and professional students with different financial needs and borrowing patterns. Although the overwhelming majority of graduate students are master’s and doctoral degree students, in the aggregate they are often overlooked. Further, when discussing student debt, it needs to be made clear whether the reference is to the total of undergraduate and graduate debt, or solely graduate debt. More than half of master’s and doctoral students have undergraduate debt and no longer have access to subsidized loans or the lower interest rates that undergraduate Stafford loans carry, which only adds to their debt burden in the long run.

CGS is prepared to engage with you and with the Committee in discussions on the issue of student debt as the future of federal student financial assistance is shaped. Please consider us as a resource for you and the Committee on this and other issues that impact graduate education. I welcome the opportunity to meet with you and look forward to following up with your office.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads 'Debra W. Stewart'.

President

Debra W. Stewart
President
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